When Art and Fashion Collide

An exhibition at Staley-Wise Gallery in New York examines the link between painting, sculpture, and photography, as documented by some of history's greatest fashion photographers.

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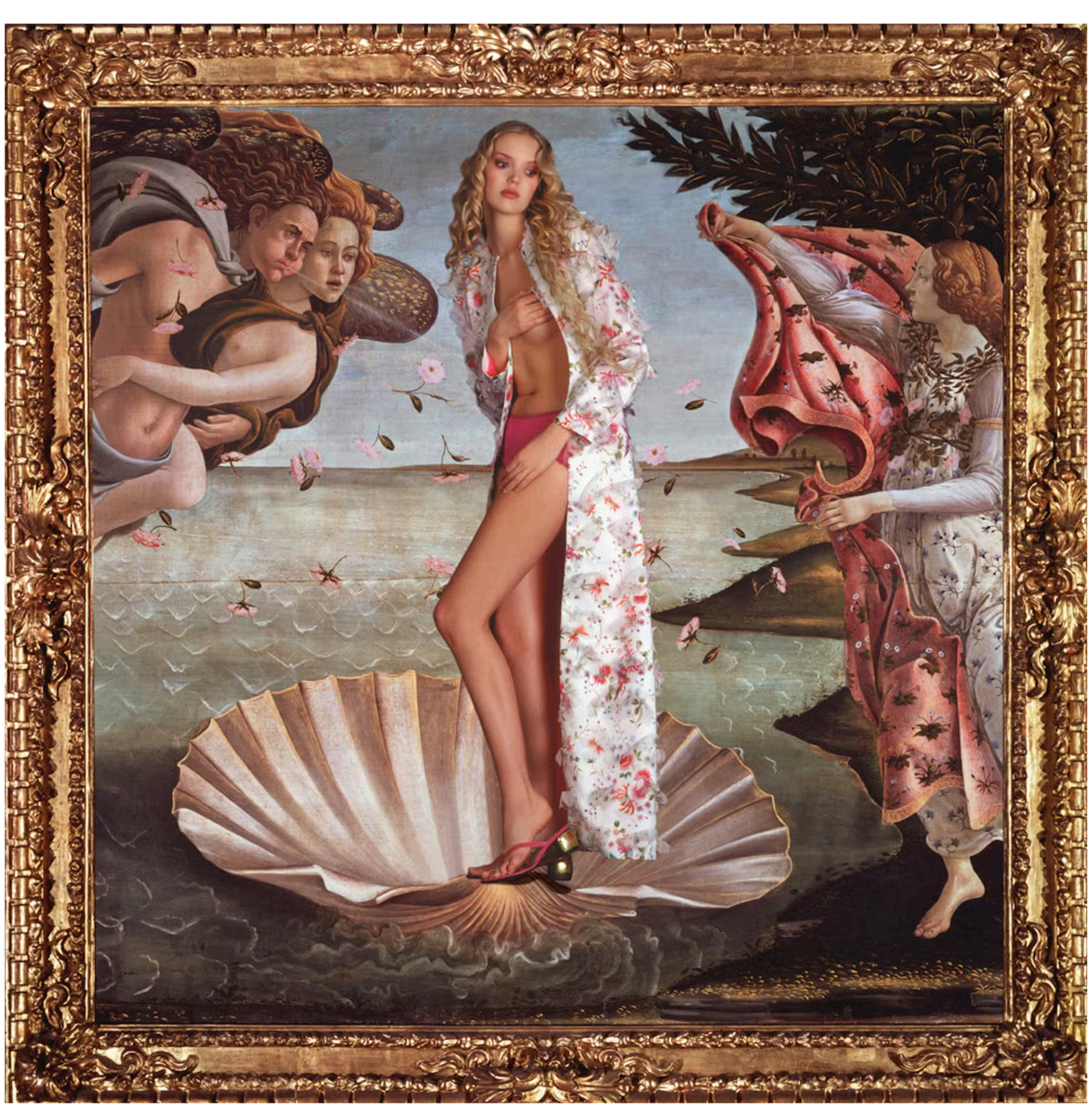
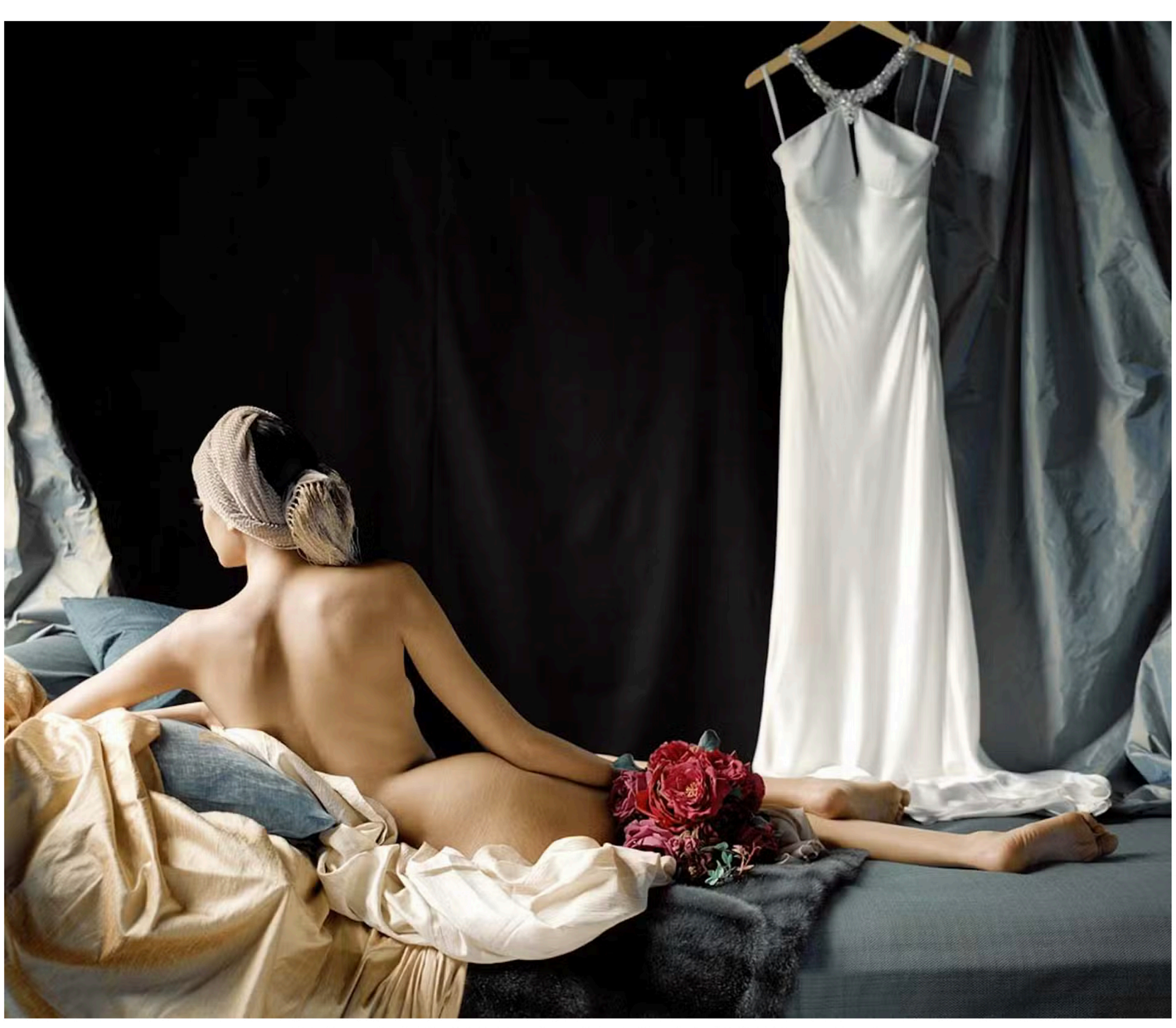
The fashion and art worlds have long been intertwined, as designers have collaborated with artists, or referenced their work directly. From Yves Saint Laurent's famous Mondrian collection, to Elsa Schiaparelli's collaborations with Jean Cocteau and Salvador Dalí, fashion has long sought to establish a connection between the applied arts and painting or sculpture. As such, when fashion photography began to overtake fashion illustration, many photographers began to position famous artworks within their imagery.

"Art + Fashion", a new exhibit at the Staley-Wise Gallery, showcases a collection of approximately 30 images ranging from the 1940's to today, all playing with the relationship between fashion and art. From Arthur Elgort to Deborah Turbeville, the exhibit ranges from traditional fashion photography to more experimental imagery where fashion happens to play a role. Several images are direct reinterpretations of famous works of art, including a rendition of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* among others.



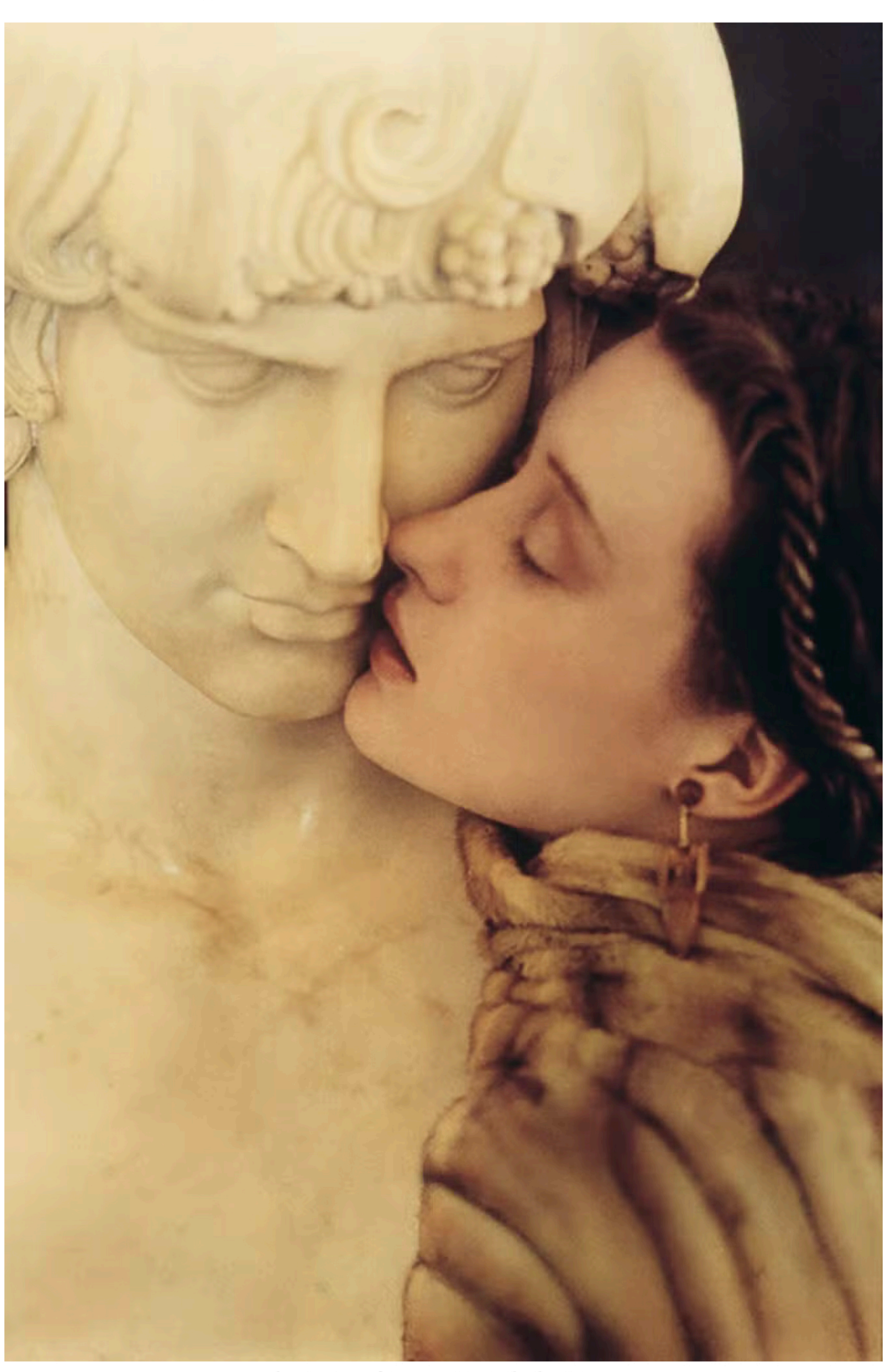
Masters of Art, Masters of Fashion : Sandro Botticelli and Todd Oldham, 1996 © Howard Schatz

Rodney Smith's *Odalisque No. 1* pays homage to Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque*, the famed Romantic painting of a concubine draped languidly across royal blue cushions. In Smith's version, the model is twisting away, not looking at the viewer. But the most striking difference between the two works is the curve of the model's torso, which had been inaccurately represented in Ingres's painting with an overly elongated spine. Here, we see the natural bend and fold of the body. Smith's photograph is remarkably painterly in form, the fabric of the white dress and the folds of the curtain in the background slightly blurred as if they were made of oil paints smudged together.



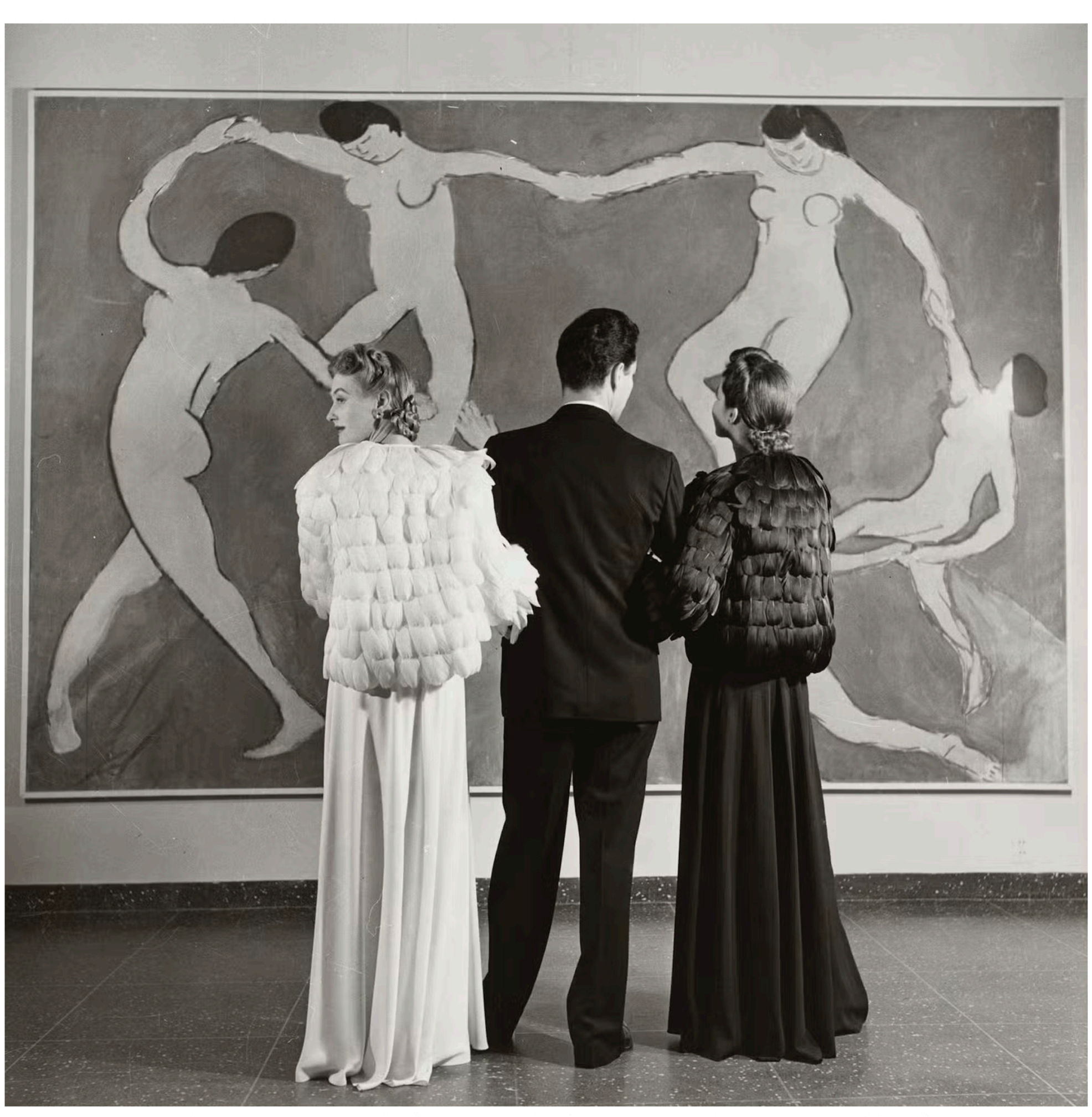
Odalisque No. 1, Winfield Estate, Long Island, New York, 2004 © Rodney Smith

Not all of the images are direct references to famous works of art. Others instead center interactions between art and viewer, like in Sheila Metzner's *The Passion of Rome*, where a model cloaked in furs reaches her face up toward a marble statue, about to press her mouth against the marble lips in a cold kiss. The juxtaposition of the velveteen softness of the fur and the hardness of the marble is enchanting.



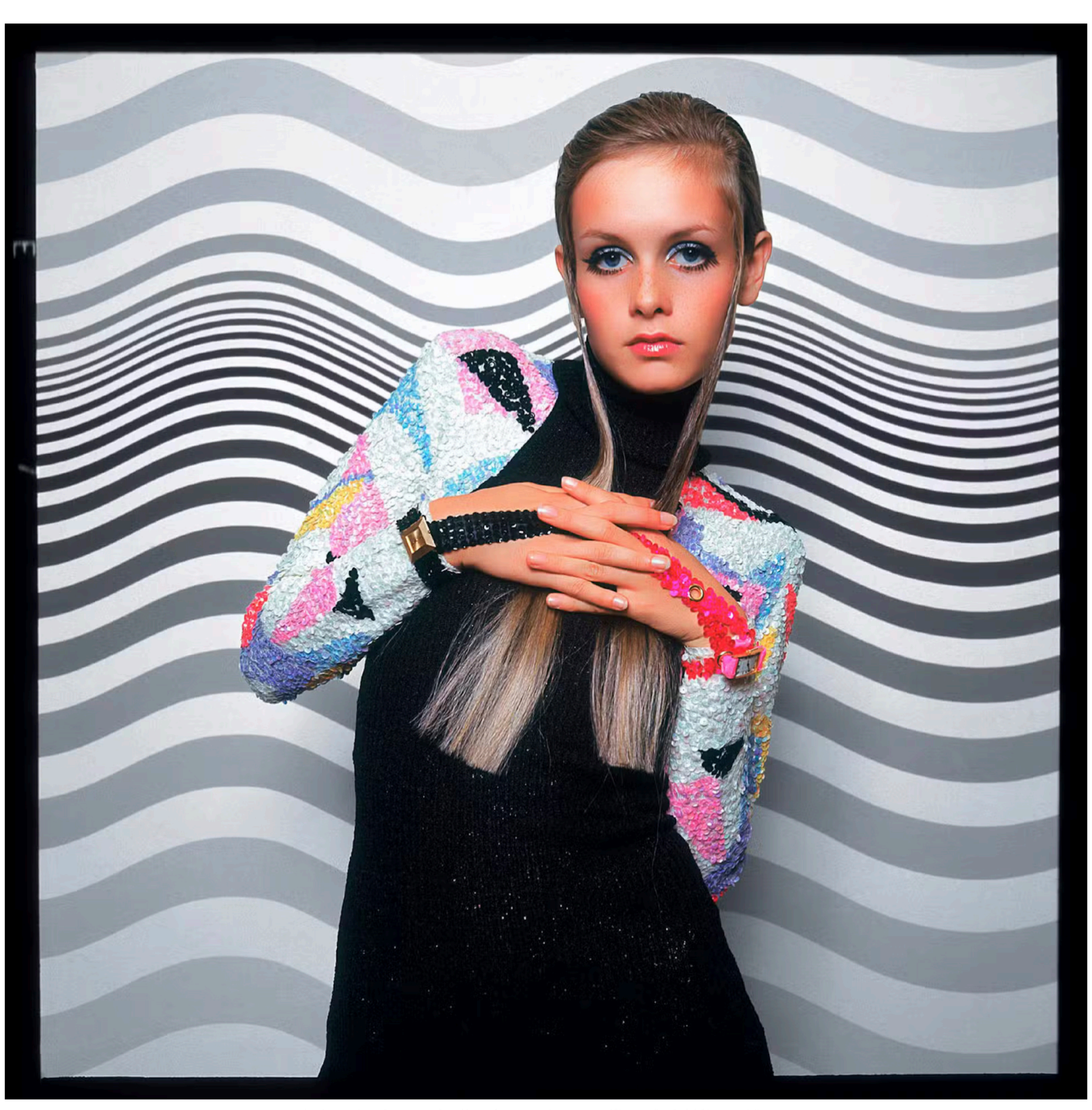
The Passion of Rome, 1986 © Sheila Metzner

Similarly, Louise Dahl-Wolfe's *Looking at Matisse (Dance I)* captures a group of three looking at Matisse's *Dance I, 1909*, hanging at the Museum of Modern Art in its new space on 53rd Street, where it had just relocated prior to Dahl-Wolfe's picture. The threesome stand with their arms linked together, much like the dancers in Matisse's painting above them, as if to complete the circle. Only one of the viewers is looking away, with the hint of a smile on her face as her two companions, a man and a woman, look intently at the painting.



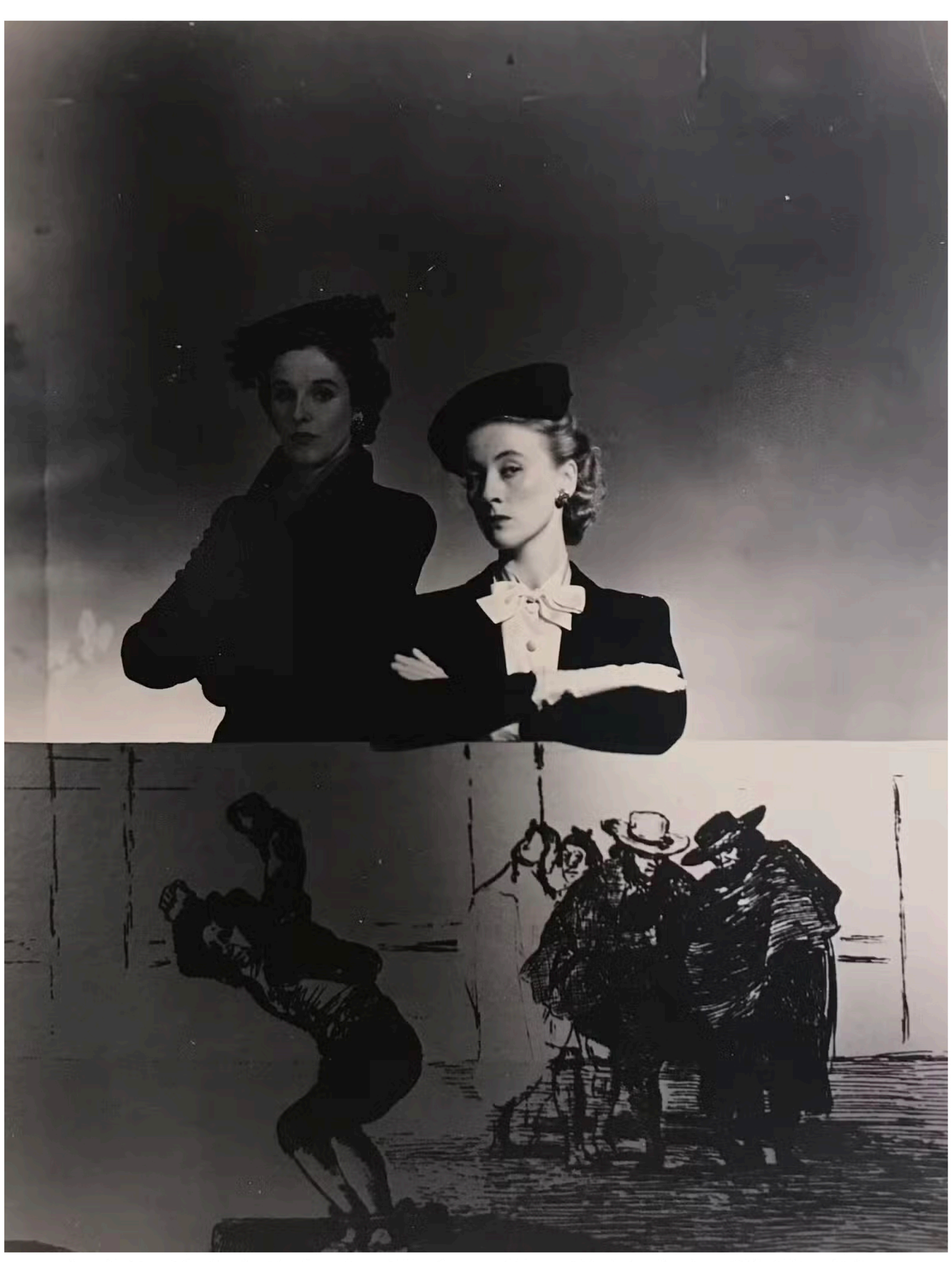
Looking at Matisse (Dance I), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, circa 1940 © Dahl Wolfe

Other standouts include Bert Stern's photograph of supermodel Twiggy posing in front of a Bridget Riley painting, featuring undulating white and grey lines in typical 1960's fashion. In a direct contrast to the painting behind her, Twiggy is in full technicolor, sporting a sequined bolero jacket with patches of baby blue, pink, yellow, and purple all glinting in the flash of the camera.



Twiggy in front of a Bridget Riley painting, 1967 © Bert Stern

Together, the works presented in "Art + Fashion" are a reflection of the interplay between fashion and the art world. Across the roughly 30 photographs, there's a clear evolution both in photographic form and style, and the ways in which fashion is interpreted alongside the art. Most importantly, it marks a significant shift in the way that fashion photography itself is perceived: as art itself.



Goya Fashion: Mrs. Stanley Mortimer, Jr. and Mrs. Desmond Fitzgerald in Balenciaga hats, 1940 © Horst P. Horst

Exhibition: "Art + Fashion", Staley-Wise Gallery, New York, until September 24.

Christina Cacouris

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